COMMISSION STRUCTURE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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Report by the Task Force on DPSS Commissions

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PREFACE

In preparing this report the task force wishes to express appreciation for the assistance of the Chairman, Dr. Alfred J. Freitag, and members of the Public Social Services Commission; the Chairman of the Special General Relief Review Committee, Benjamin Bendat; and the Chairman, Charles F. Horne, Jr., and members of the Commission to Review Public Social Services. We have also conferred with representatives of the Chief Administrative Office, Jerry Roos and Susan Lopez, and the Acting Director of the Department of Public Social Services, Keith Comrie. We thank them for their cooperation.

All are in agreement that a single citizens commission should replace the present structure of two commissions and a committee. On some details members of the two commissions and committee may differ in their views from our proposal, as is indicated in the report on the subject by the Commission to Review Public Social Services. The differences, however, do not appear to be substantial. We understand that the Chief Administrative Office and the Department of Public Social Services concur with our proposal.

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I. SUMMARY

This report is submitted in answer to a request by the Board of Supervisors to study the citizen commissions assigned to the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS).

Currently, two commissions and one committee are assigned to the department. The Public Social Services Commission, established in 1967, consists of 15 members. The Commission to Review Public Social Services, established in 1971, consists of 5 members. The ordinances establishing these two commissions assign them similar and overlapping duties - to review department operations and to provide advice and recommendations to the Director and the Board of Supervisors.

A third group, the Special General Relief Review Committee, established in 1975, consists of 14 members and 14 alternates. It acts as a subcommittee to the Public Social Services Commission with responsibility to review all aspects of the County's General Relief Program.

The cost for stipends and direct staff services for these three groups is $172,461. Of this amount approximately $50,000 is reimbursed by Federal and State subventions. (See Table A.)

We recommend a consolidation of these groups into a single commission consisting of 11 members. The cost of the proposed commission will amount to $53,000 a year. The direct savings to the County will amount to approximately $108,000. (See Table B.) In addition, our recommendations eliminate the overlap and duplication which now exists between the current commissions. The result should be more effective concentration and emphasis on the watchdog and citizen review function which we propose for the single commission.

The details of our proposal are presented in the following sections of our report, including specific recommendations for Board action listed in Section III, p. 7.

II. ARGUMENTS FOR A SINGLE COMMISSION

Tables A and B provide a detailed breakdown of current commission costs to DPSS in comparison to the cost of the single proposed commission. In consideration of the strict budgetary limitation under which the County is now operating, a savings of $108,000 a year provides a strong argument in favor of the single commission. In addition, the consolidation into a single commission will eliminate serious operating disadvantages in the present commission structure and provide a more effective citizen review function.

1. It will provide a single advisory source to which both the Board and the Director can refer questions for commission review or consultation. It will eliminate the present confusion over the duplication of responsibilities between the Public Social Services Commission and the Commission to Review Public Social Services.

The titles of the two commissions in themselves indicate the lack of clear demarcation between their respective responsibilities. The ordinances establishing the two commissions add to the confusion. The ordinance for the Public Social Services Commission directs it to "Conduct studies on special projects and make recommendations to the Director and the Board for improvement of policies, systems, and procedures for the administration of Public Social Services." The ordinance for the Commission to Review Public Social Services directs it similarly to " . . . serve in an advisory capacity to the Board to review the management and administration of the Department of Public Social Services." A single commission will eliminate this duplication.

2. One might argue that a solution to the dilemma is to revise the ordinances to distinguish between the responsibilities of each commission, making one, for example, responsible for issues involving welfare philosophy or policy and the other restricted solely to

questions of management and operating efficiency. However, because the two areas are intricately inter-mixed and inter-dependent, such an attempt would almost certainly prove ineffective.

This conclusion is supported by ample evidence drawn from the current activities of the two commissions. The Public Social Services Commission, for example, recently recommended - and the Board approved - the transfer of the operation of MacLaren Hall from the Probation Department to DPSS. The reasons to support this recommendation involved both welfare policy and more effective and appropriate management.

Of the 20 current projects which this commission is concerned with, five are predominantly concerned with policy, such as the Homemaker/Chore Program and amendments to Title XX. On the other hand, 15 are concerned primarily with management problems such as application procedures for public assistance, civil service disciplinary actions, and the control of fraud.

The Commission to Review Public Social Services has concerned itself principally with managerial problems. Nevertheless, in its recent study of the Food Stamp Program it made recommendations in such policy areas as income ceilings and standard deductions for food stamp recipients.

The two commissions have recognized this persistent problem, and have exchanged work plans to attempt to eliminate duplicate activities. Nevertheless, in recent reports by the two commissions on their current projects, there is evidence that they still duplicate each other's activities. (See "Request for Justification of Commission to Review Public Social Services," letter to the Chief Administrative Office, June 2, 1976, and "Public Social Services Commission Agenda Items, Jan.-Dec., 1976," letter to Supervisor Ward, May 10, 1976.)

3. DPSS is constantly being audited by Federal, State, and local agencies. These include day-to-day audits by such agencies at the Federal level as the Department of Health, Education and Welfare,

Department of Agriculture, and the General Accounting Office; by such agencies at the State level as the Department of Benefit Payments, Department of Health, and Controller's Office; by such agencies at the local level as the Grand Jury and the Auditor-Controller. In addition, there are occasional audits by the State Department of Finance and the State Legislative Analyst.

Cooperating with these audits and responding to their conclusions requires a substantial allocation of time and effort by DPSS management and staff. In addition, DPSS management and staff must constantly meet with the various welfare rights organizations and over 100 other voluntary organizations operating in the community.

Attending meetings and presenting identical briefings to the two separate commissions adds to the burden of meeting attendance, amounting on the average to five or six commission meetings a month. A single commission would substantially reduce the cost and time involved in this effort. Because this saving is difficult to estimate accurately it is not included in our savings figure.

These are the principal reasons why we believe that a single commission structure will be more efficient and effective in providing citizen review of DPSS operations.

We should note that our recommendation also includes the termination of the General Relief Review Committee. This committee was scheduled to complete its work by August 31, 1976. We believe any further requirement for review of the general relief program should be conducted by the proposed new commission.

One final question remains. Does DPSS need any such citizen review commission at all? Our conclusion is that for the minimum cost which we propose, such citizen participation in resolving the extremely complex problems of this

massive organization should well pay for itself. The recommendations of the present commissions have resulted in significant operating improvements and substantial savings. We believe this effort should continue. First, it provides valuable services and skills to the government at minimal cost. Second, by involving citizens directly in the operation of their government it educates them in the processes and problems of government and provides them an opportunity to influence events. Third, a commission for Public Social Services provides an appropriate and necessary public forum for the airing of major policy issues in the field of welfare which are of vital concern to the Board, DPSS administration, welfare recipients and the public.

III. STRUCTURE AND OPERATION OF THE PROPOSED COMMISSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force recommends:

1. *That the Board of Supervisors abolish the two existing commissions in the Department of Public Social Services and replace them with a single new commission to be called the Commission for Public Social Services.*

2. *That the Special General Relief Review Committee be discontinued as scheduled on August 31, 1976, when it has completed its report on the General Relief Program. The new commission will assume responsibility for any further studies in this area.*

3. *That the Board instruct the County Counsel to submit an ordinance amending the Administrative Code to establish the new commission as follows:*

Membership

The Commission will consist of 11 members appointed by the Board of Supervisors. In selecting members the Board shall seek individuals, insofar as possible, based on the following criteria.

1. Ten members (two appointed by each Supervisor) shall be experienced in the management and operation of a large private business or have a background in the professions, civic affairs, or public charitable activities.

2. One member (appointed by the Supervisor who is Chairman of the Department of Public Social Services) shall be a welfare recipient or a representative of the welfare rights organizations.

3. No member shall be a County employee.

Duties

The Commission shall:

1. Consult with and advise the Director of Public Social Services and the Board of Supervisors on all matters relating to the provision of Public Social Services, including but not restricted to, financial assistance and social services.

2. Conduct studies and make recommendations to the Director and the Board on any and all aspects of the management and operation of the Department of Public Social Services in order to promote the efficient and cost-effective delivery of departmental services.

3. Conduct public hearings as necessary to determine the attitudes and needs of the public, both recipient and non-recipient, and cooperate with organizations and private citizens to improve public social services; advise the Director and the Board of all findings and recommendations based on public input.

4. Review proposed Federal, State, and local legislation and regulations for potential impact on the County and make recommendations to the Director and the Board.

5. Appoint staff personnel as authorized by the Board and direct staff activities in support of Commission objectives.

Principles of Operation

1. The Commission is appointed by and reports solely to the Board of Supervisors. The budget, however, should be assigned to DPSS.

2. The Members shall serve for a term of two years. However, the Board may remove a member at any time. Remuneration will be $50 a month for services rendered to the Commission, provided that a member has attended at least one meeting during the month. Members will be reimbursed for their expenses, including transportation, meals, and lodging, only if required to travel outside the County on Commission business. Such travel must be approved by the Board of Supervisors in accordance with County policy.

3. The staff personnel shall consist of an executive director and a secretary. They may be appointed as the Commission determines, using civil service procedures or using a contract procedure independent of the civil service system.

4. The Commission shall establish internal operating policies and procedures, consistent with the ordinance, covering such matters as the time and place of meetings, selection of officers, terms of office, obligations of Commission members, structures of subcommittees or advisory councils, if any, and the responsibilities of officers, such subcommittees as may be established, and the staff.

DISCUSSION

The above provisions are mostly self-explanatory. Some comments, however, are in order on the membership, stipend, and staff recommendations.

Membership - It is difficult to establish specific qualifications for a commission covering such a broad area of responsibility. We would hope that the Board of Supervisors would appoint members so that the commission would contain a balanced representation of expertise in business management and interest in and knowledge of welfare and poverty problems.

The one member who is a welfare recipient or a representative of the welfare rights organizations will provide the commission with a formal channel of communication with those persons most affected by the welfare system. The allocation of a single seat on the commission to a recipient advocate was determined on the basis of the relative percentage which recipients bear to the total population. In order for the commission to maintain a balanced and objective viewpoint, we feel that the commission membership should generally reflect the interests of the entire citizenry and not be weighted in favor of any special interest group.

With respect to size, the present commissions contain fifteen and five members respectively. We believe eleven members for the new commission will enable the Board to appoint members who possess an appropriate range of experience and interest and at the same time will keep the commission operation from becoming overly cumbersome.

Stipend - The recommended stipend of $50 a month is an innovation. All commissions and committees in the County which now receive a stipend are paid at the rate of so much per meeting - $25 for the majority of advisory commissions to $150 for the Employee Relations Commission.

The stipend per meeting policy, however, tends to encourage commissions to hold meetings. Consequently, most such groups are limited to a set

number of meetings per month. The members of the Public Social Services Commission receive $25 a meeting, limited to four meetings a month, and are reimbursed for legitimate expenses. The members of the Commission to Review Public Social Services receive no stipend, but are reimbursed for expenses.

Our recommendation is designed to eliminate the inducement to hold more meetings than necessary. At the same time it reimburses members for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses. The basic principle, we believe, should be that service on such a commission should result in neither gain nor loss to members.

As an alternative, the County could reimburse commissioners only for actual expenses incurred - mileage to and from meetings for the most part. The paperwork involved in processing expense reports and disbursing compensation checks with a variety of different amounts, however, would hardly be worth the small reduction in total cost the County might experience.

Staff - If there is a demonstrable need for a citizen commission - as we believe there is for DPSS - then the commission should be provided with sufficient staff to assist it in collecting and analyzing information and preparing reports and recommendations in accordance with its assigned duties.

This staff should be appointed by the commission and function solely under its direction. While departmental personnel can provide effective assistance at times in commission studies, the commission can operate with appropriate independence only if it has its own assigned staff. Departmental personnel can be exposed to a serious conflict between their career progress and the commission's activities whenever recommendations by the commission generate opposition within the department. If the commission is performing effectively as a watchdog representing citizen interests, it is almost bound to generate such opposition from time to time.

Therefore, we think it is important that the commission have the authority to appoint and direct its own staff, which we recommend as one executive director and a secretary. If more assistance is needed on particular studies, the commission can borrow staff from time to time from the department, or with the approval of the Board contract for assistance with outside consultants, or finally if the need is demonstrated, request the Board for additional permanent staff.

CURRENT COMMISSION COSTS

PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Cost Element	1975-76 Commitment
DPSS Support Staff:	
No. Pos. Classification	
1 Program Analyst	$ 21,167*
.5 Inter. Steno	4,869*
1.5	
Employee Benefits @ 21.67%	6,662
Sub-Total	$ 31,678
Members' Compensation:	
(Max. 4 mtgs. per month x 15 Commissioners)	$ 18,000
Mileage Allowance (@ 14¢ a mile)	3,200
Sub-Total	$ 21,200
Total	$ 52,878

*Reflects 5th step salaries less anticipated salary savings of 4.09%

GENERAL RELIEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Cost Element	1975-76 Commitment
DPSS Support Staff:	
No. Pos. Classification	
1 Asst. Prog. Deputy	$ 22,971*
1.0 Steno Sec.	10,207*
2.0	
Employee Benefits @ 21.67%	7,190
Sub-Total	$ 40,368
Non-County Employee Members Compensation:	
Stipend @ $25 a meeting	$ 3,500
Mileage Allowance (@ 14¢ a mile)	1,800
Sub-Total	$ 5,300
Total	$ 45,668

*Reflects 5th step salaries less anticipated salary savings of 4.09%

COMMISSION TO REVIEW PSS

Cost Element	1975-76 Commitment
DPSS Support Staff:	
Inter. Steno Sec.	$ 12,032*
Employee Benefits at 21.67%	2,594
Sub-Total	$ 14,639
Exec. Officers' Contracts:	
Executive Director	$ 31,800
Travel expense and mileage	2,600
Asst. Exec. Director	23,676
Travel expense and mileage	1,200
Sub-Total	$ 55,476
Total	$ 73,915

*Reflects 5th step salaries less anticipated salary savings of 4.09%.

Total Cost of the Three Groups	$172,461
Federal and State Reimbursement	50,267
Net County Cost	$122,194

TABLE A

PROPOSED COMMISSION COSTS AND SAVINGS

Costs	Gross	Fed. & State Reimbursement	Net County Cost
$50 stipend x 11 commissioners x 12 months	$ 6,600	$ 4,914	$ 1,686
Executive Director - Salary	31,800	23,675	8,125
Secretary - Salary and Benefits	14,639	10,899	3,740
Total Cost	$ 53,039	$39,488	$ 13,551

Savings	Gross	Fed. & State	County
Current Commission Cost	172,461	50,267	122,194
Proposed Commission Cost	53,039	39,488	13,551
Total Savings	$119,422	$10,779	$108,643

TABLE B